

New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1947

Volume VIII, Number 22

Rachel W. Coffin, Editor

Week of December 15, 1947

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THEATRE OPENINGS

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NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
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"Angel in the Wings"

Journal of the American

DECEMBER 12, 1947

A Happy, Young Hit With the Hartmans

By ROBERT GARLAND

"Angel in the Wings," the happy young hit at the Coronet, couldn't have happened to nicer people. Up on the stage, everybody in sight is gracious and gifted and just about what this all-too-serious minded season needed. They, plus their various accoutrements, add up to the intimate musical revue for which we untired business men have long been waiting.

The Ewings, Marjorie and Sherman, fetched their bright new little show in from last Summer's citronella circuit. There, where it was billed and applauded as "Heaven Help the Angels," The Hartmans, Grace and Paul, were, as now, its mainstays. Somewhere between Long Island and Boston, they—The Ewings and The Hartmans—made up their minds to bring the piece to Broadway.

This they've gone and done, surrounding The Hartmans with other gracious and gifted players. Hank Ladd, for instance, the only living funny man who can look like Thomas E. Dewey and pronounce "leisure" correct-

ly. And at the same time! And Viola Roache, of all people, a truly great lady of the theatre who sings and dances and throws herself about as if to the manner born.

And some gracious and gifted girls and boys of whom you'll soon be hearing. Graduating from the movies, the radio, the night clubs and the like, they, too, clown and sing and dance with ardor and affection.

Superior Slapstick

In two acts and nineteen episodes, The Hartmans, Grace and Paul, open the show and close it. They're really very funny, these dancers daring to be different. To the satire of their stepping they've added a superior sort of slapstick. And, like all good teammates, one complements the other. For the most part, Paul's the dead pan stooge for Grace's live pan clowning.

They're at their nose thumbing best, I think, in "Up Early with

the Upjohns," a radio burlesque which, for the most personal of reasons, had The Kollmars, seated across the aisle from me, in stitches. Their "Professor de Marco and Company," a satire on what the dear dead two-day billed as "a novelty act," has a bit of pathos hidden beneath its superficial good meaning fun.

In "The Glamorous Inga-bord," in which the one-and-that's-enough Hildegarde comes in for a ribald ribbing; in "Trailer Trouble," in which dear old Dixie is taken for a ride and in "The Salina Select Garden Club," in which suburban lecturers are hoisted with their own petard, Grace and Paul are as good as, when not better than, their not too unfamiliar material.

It's material of their own devising, in collaboration with Ted Luce, their son, and Hank Ladd, the aforesaid funny man who looks like Thomas E. Dewey and pronounces "leisure" correctly.

Hank's a Find

This Hank Ladd is no little of a find. A genteel refugee from radio, where he had something behind the scenes to do with a Mr. Baker and a Mr. Hope, Mr. Ladd emerges from the airwaves as a comedian of parts. He can tell a story, sing a song and kid the show business as effectively as any funny man I know. Even his clothes look as if they were his own.

Then there's a girl named Elaine

'ANGEL IN THE WINGS'

An intimate musical revue; words and music by Bob Hilliard and Carl Sigman; sketches by Hank Ladd, Ted Luce and the Hartmans; production staged by John Kennedy; settings and lighting by Donald Oenslager; choreography by Edward Noll; costumes by Julia Rae; musical arrangements by David Mann and Frank Barovick; musical director, Phil Ingalls; presented by Marjorie and Sherman Ewing at the Coronet Theatre Thursday evening, December 11, 1947. The players include Paul and Grace Hartman, Hank Ladd, Nadine Gae and Peter Hamilton, Robert Stanton, Eileen Barton, Johnny Barnes, Elaine Stritch, Viola Roache, Janet Gaylord, Alva Green and Bill McGraw.

Stritch who, making her debut on Broadway, is someone on whom to keep an appreciative eye. Her song, "Civilization," takes over The Hit Parade tomorrow. And her harassed Hildegardean rendition of "The Last Time I Saw Paris" is something to make even Hildegarde herself uneasy. Wherever she is, she'd better come home to protect her interests.

Johnny Barnes is a better-than-good young dancer, especially when he taps his toes to the wordless vocal accompaniment of Mr. Ladd, Nadine Gae and Peter Hamilton make a useful dance team whenever they manage to get around to it. And Phil Ingalls and his fellow musicians do well by the Bob Hilliard-Carl Sigman score. Especially by my pet number about The Thousand Islands...

So, back where I started, "Angel in the Wings" was a happy hit last night on 49th st. I do hope there're enough untired business men around to keep it good and going for many a month to come.

DAILY NEWS

DECEMBER 12, 1947

'Angel in Wings' Cheerful Revue With the Very Funny Hartmans

By JOHN CHAPMAN

In the case of most revues which are called intimate, the word intimate means no dough. Often it means no fun, either. In the case of "Angel in the Wings," which opened last evening in the quite chummy Coronet Theatre, the term means just what it says. The show is a cozy affair, and because it has Paul and Grace Hartman and Hank Ladd in it it is funny, too.

Very funny, in fact. Anything with the Hartmans in it is bound to be, because they are real humorists; and in Mr. Ladd they have found a pleasant companion and confederer who can make one anecdote, like the one about the time his father came home 'way past being drunk, last for a complete change of scenery and costumes.

I could wish that the tunes and

lyrics by Bob Hilliard and Carl Sigman—except for the already familiar "Civilization"—were a little catchier or more brilliant, but I guess they pass the time well enough while the Hartmans are getting ready for another sketch.

By this time in your life you must have seen the Hartmans. Grace is a pert and wise little woman; Paul is a lummox. He thinks he is a dancer but he can't dance, and he thinks he is a magician but he can't magick. This is their routine from the Palace days.

In "Angel in the Wings" they

have material to work with. A sketch depicting the morning recitation of commercial plugs by one of those Mr. and Mrs. radio teams is just what I have been wanting for years, and now I've had it and am happy with it.

More Good Sketches.

Another number, burlesquing Hildegarde in her radio night club, is excellent satire, in which Paul and Grace have very good help from Elaine Stritch, Robert Stanton and Viola Roache. A third is passable, being about an old ex-soldier who has gone to college in order to find a trailer for himself and his wife to live in. And a fourth, in which the Hartmans are a pair of explorers giving a lecture to a women's garden club, is de-

liciously funny. Another skit called "Swingasy" has a good enough idea but doesn't work out well.

Miss Stritch, a handsome affair, sings the jungle song, "Civilization" a little too trickily for me, but she is amusing as Hildegarde and as a Southern belle.

Eileen Barton sings several of the other songs. I made note about two. One of them said "Why do you treat me unkind you drive me out of my mind." Who's driving who out of whose mind? The other, "Tambourine," is a torch song with an accompanying apache dance staged almost exactly like the "Moanin' Low" number Libby Holman and Clifton Webb used to do—only "Tambourine" isn't so hot.

Nadine Gae, Peter Hamilton and Johnny Barnes do the dances, and in one number Barnes works a lot the way James Barton used to, and well. Mr. Ladd, pretending that he is the angel of the show, introduces the numbers. He describes a typical Tennessee Williams heroine as a girl who is disappointed because she has two ears.

There is nothing big-bang about "Angel in the Wings." The scenery, by Donald Oenslager, is cheerfully modest—and so, in fact, is the show.

"Angel in the Wings"—continued

New York Post

DECEMBER 12, 1947

The Hartmans Hilarious In an Intimate Revue

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

The Hartmans, who have hitherto been regarded as amusing but limited parodists of the serious-minded dance acts, emerge as important candidates for the select company of the top-rank clowns in the new revue called "Angel in the Wings." In the past I have enjoyed their terpsichorean burlesques while suspecting that it might be possible to get too much of them. At the Coronet Theatre last night, though, they were so wonderfully hilarious as they went about impersonating a husband-and-wife radio breakfast team, a pair of lecturing explorers, a magician and his

helper, an ex-G.I. and his suspicious wife, and other interesting personalities that it wasn't even possible to get enough of them.

Since comedy is its most welcome feature, it is only just to add that there is another funny fellow in "Angel in the Wings." Appearing in what is actually the title role, a rather saturnine gentleman named Hank Ladd, pretending that he was the backer of the show, came before the curtain from time to time to discuss backstage topics and other appropriate matters. The first time or two I didn't pay much attention to him, but it soon became evident that he has such a gift for chatting informally and amusingly with his audience that it was possible upon occasion to be reminded of the great Joe Cook without too much sacrilege.

Outside of the Hartmans and Hank Ladd, there are only a few items concerning "Angel in the Wings" which deserve much contemplation. It is one of those "in-

timate" revues, which means that there is no chorus, but doesn't necessarily imply that it should be quite as slender as the proceedings at the Coronet sometimes seemed. The production is brightened by some of Donald Oenslager's attractive sets, a charming dancer named Nadine Gae and a couple of pleasant songs, but it has a few aspects not so commendable.

For example, Elaine Stritch, an energetic girl, tries a parody of Hildegarde, and I submit that it is not possible to do a parody of Hildegarde. No matter how malicious the intended impersonation may be, it cannot be as incredible as the original, and, fiercely as Miss Stritch worked, she couldn't be expected to be up to it. There is also a Petrillo sketch, in which juke-box recordings are bootlegged in the fashion of prohibition days, but, so far as I am concerned, it is just another stage wait.

Among the features of the

show is a song called "Civilization," which is, I believe, already among the big hits of the day. Strenuously sung by the aforesaid Miss Stritch, it is a lively and enjoyable number, but my favorite musical item of the evening is one in which Mr. Ladd tells sadly about losing his girl in the Thousand Islands and not remembering which island. He is as admirable at that as he is in his vocal accompaniment to Johnny Barnes' lively tap dance.

As an example of the almost lost art of the intimate revue, "Angel in the Wings" leaves a good deal to be desired. It happens, however, that good, hearty comedy and brilliant, vigorous comings are sadly rare in the theatre of today, and, when such superior clowns as the Hartmans and Hank Ladd are given a chance to frolic contentedly, there would be reason for gratitude to a far less satisfactory show than this. Here are comedians worth knowing.

The New York Times

DECEMBER 12, 1947

Paul and Grace Hartman Head Cast of New Revue, 'Angel in the Wings,' at the Coronet

By BROOKS ATKINSON

As evidence of the progressive spirit of the age, Paul and Grace Hartman have been promoted. They are head folks in an extremely pleasant musical revue, "Angel in the Wings," put on at the Coronet last evening. For years the Hartmans have been making serious dancing totally unnecessary in this town with their inspired parodies. Just so that you will know where you are, they offer two in "Angel in the Wings," one of which presents them as dauntless explorers interpreting a native dance to a ladies' garden club. It is a devastatingly humorous satire on lecture platform explorers, native dancing, garden

clubs and just about anything else you can think of.

For the whole world looks pretty giddy when the Hartmans start performing. Paul has one of the most peculiar faces in show business. No one can look quite so dazed; no one can be so desperately puzzled. In his fleeting rhapsodic moods, he does not look much better, to tell the truth. Somehow his teeth seem to be dropping through, for there is a kind of hang-dog quality to his rapture. Grace is the wholesome and intelligent member of the team, with a pleasant smile, a spirit of decision and a giggle. Teamed up

with an ambling dope, she is the one who makes things work.

These are the characters they play. But there is an instinctive modesty about the Hartmans that makes their humor not only hilarious but disarming and captivating. They are a royal pair of entertainers. "Angel in the Wings" offers them also in a number of neatly written revue sketches which they translate into a special brand of crack-brained merriment.

They are ably abetted by Hank Ladd, who is an immensely skillful patter comedian. You may not feel too hopeful when Mr. Ladd strolls on in the second number to kid the show with withering wise-cracks. But Mr. Ladd, of the dead-pan school of jesters, has written his numbers with a nice wit, and he delivers them with some of the drollery of Joe Cook. Mr. Ladd is a very funny man, quiet in style, dry in manner and vastly comic. He belongs in the Hartman school of polite entertainment.

As a matter of fact, it is a constructive idea to present Broadway

with a small revue at this season. "Angel in the Wings" looks expensive in a refined sort of way with some cheerful settings by Donald Oenslager and some beautiful costumes by Julia Ska. Excepting for a first-rate turn of tap-dancing by Johnny Barnes, the choreography is on the precious side. Excepting for "Civilization," which Elaine Stritch sings in a mock calypso style, the music is fairly unmusical, and some of the singing is fashionably flat.

But the tone is light and informal and "Angel in the Wings" is an uncommonly likable evening of fooling. For it is time that the Hartmans got promoted from the supper clubs to the theatre, where people can see them. As revue performers they have worked out their sketches with all the perfection of detail that has made their dance parodies uproarious, and they skim through their new nonsense with the same grace and drollery. They are wonderful performers, and "Angel in the Wings" is a capital show.

Daily Mirror

DECEMBER 12, 1947

'Angel in the Wings' Is Very Funny

By ROBERT COLEMAN

It all started on the straw-hat circuit—"Angel in the Wings"—which arrived at the Coronet Theatre last evening. Paul and Grace Hartman used much of it as a vehicle for a Summer tour. Their reception was enthusiastic, so Marjorie and Sherman Ewing decided to put a few of their superfluous greenbacks behind it for a Broadway run.

"Angel in the Wings" is more commercial and less arty than

"Garrick Gaities," of fond memory, and less elaborate and tasteful than "One for the Money," a jewel box of a revue. But it has an asset neither of them boasted: the gorgeously wacky Hartmans.

The hilarious Hartmans kid the daylight out of dancing, society, lecturers, trailer addicts and Hildegarde. Their humor is credible and funny. It comes from people and not from a typewriter oiled with formula. It is not the reduction of smoking car jokes to the sketch.

The Hartmans are wonderful. They've been around. They've studied mugs and the elite. When they strike a comedy blow it is beautifully aimed and flies unerringly to its mark. There's

nothing namby-pamby about them. They know how to wield a slapstick with the best of 'em, but they also know better than most have and where to apply it. Aiding them in provoking laughter is Hank Ladd, a smart cookie who teamed perfectly with Bert Wheeler for a few seasons. Hank is suave, dead-panned, has a dandy sense of timing, possesses a nasal delivery that's a combination of Fred Allen's and Dr. Rockwell's, knows all the tricks of show business and can emcee with the best of 'em.

Hank had the first nighters roaring with his story of how the producer obtained \$70,000 from him (impersonating an angel), cashed a six horse parlay at the racetrack, won over a mil-

"Angel in the Wings"—continued

lion dollars and, after paying the taxes, had only \$30,000 left.

Nadine Gae and Peter Hamilton are tops at modern dancing. They could fill the bill anytime Nora Kaye and Hugh Laing wanted to take a vacation from Ballet Theatre's "Pillar of Fire." Johnny Barnes is an easy-working, non-pumping tapster, with a

pleasing personality.

Others meriting salutes for their contributions are songstress Eileen Barton, Viola Roache, Elaine Stritch and Robert Stanton.

Ladd, the Hartmans and Ted Luce are credited with the sketches. Bob Hillard and Carl Sigman did the score, from

which four numbers already have been recorded. John Kennedy came through with a first rate job of staging, making a lot of little when his material ran thin on occasions.

Donald Oenslager, working on what was probably a limited budget, has designed a serviceable production. As Ladd put it

in a monologue, he's a handy guy with a paint brush. Julia Sze can take a bow for the costumes.

"Angels in the Wings" flatters an audience's intelligence and wrecks its collective funny bone. It's marvelous to have a revue around again that makes sense and still manages to generate laughs in wholesale lots.



DECEMBER 14, 1947

Kronenberger

The Hilarious Hartmans In an Intimate Revue

The Hartmans reach the high point of their careers in *Angel in the Wings*; and a very high point it is. They have always been funny for half an hour or so, but now they are a great deal funnier for a great deal longer. And teamed up with them, as confederer and patter-merchant, is another very admirable character, Hank Ladd. Mr. Ladd has not only the right timing and style for his job, but what I find much rarer, the right personality also.



Having (I hope) made clear how very good these people are, I ought to add that they darn well have to be. The rest of *Angel in the Wings* is on the skimpy and even the sad side. Much that has gone into it has merely lodged there like a bullet. Much might have better been left out. The Hartmans and Mr. Ladd are hardly such gifted authors as they are actors: their skits and spiels could frequently stand the pruning shears, and sometimes even the ax. And most of the songs and dances in *Angel*, though perhaps not actually bad, seem monumentally unimportant.

But our three friends more than make up for what's wrong with the show. Turn the Hartmans loose on a fat enough skit (like their take-off of a Mr. & Mrs. At Break-

fast radio program) and nothing could be gayer. Even turn them loose on not too lean a skit (like their take-off of an old vaudeville "novelty act") and things still are gay. Let them shoot the works, as in their imitation of a tribal dance, and you get the two-in-one satisfaction of good satire and good rough-house. The rather dead-pan Mrs. Hartman, with her controlled exasperations, is in excellent contrast to the superbly awkward Mr. Hartman, with his dazzling oafishness.

As for Mr. Ladd, he's around all evening without being a bore for a moment; which is saying a lot in view of a lot of his patter. But when the patter's both new and bright, it becomes exceedingly funny; and Mr. Ladd also sings the one song of the evening I really enjoyed, about a girl he's trying to find on what could be any one of the Thousand Islands.

Viola Roache helps out with the comedy; Eileen Barton sings several of the songs; and Elaine Stritch is singer and comedienne both. Nadine Gae and Peter Hamilton do several dances together, and Johnny Barnes has one to himself. If none of these people prove very exciting, they all fit agreeably into the spirit of an intimate revue. And *Angel* has that spirit even when it has little else; and has it, too, in Donald Oenslager's slight but graceful sets. It's too bad the show didn't regard itself with a sterner eye. But it's enjoyable for all that. —LOUIS KRONENBERGER

New York World-Telegram

DECEMBER 12, 1947

'Angel in the Wings' Is a Delightful Show

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

At last the town has one of those gems of intimate revues that seemed to have gone out of fashion. The Hartman's unpretentious "Angel in the Wings" is the most amiable way we know to spend an evening laughing yourself silly.

Among the few top clowns of our day, Grace and Paul Hartman prance their way through a joyous small-scale show that has the informal warmth of an egg-nog party in full swing.

Paul Hartman's stupendous confusion, and Grace's absurdly earnest efforts to straighten him out, are familiar but as welcome as ever. They draw on some of their well-known acts as springboards, but proceed into fresh fantasies invariably funny enough to ruin stomach muscles and mascara.

One of their best sketches, early in the show, is a devastating comment on the syrupy Mr. and Mrs. prebreakfast broadcasts. They are boisterous tourists at a Hildegarde show, and get involved in some insanity in a trailer which leads Hartman to use his teeth to unpin a bag of jewels from the back of an ex-Wac's brassiere. They top all this with the performance of some native dances at a garden club.

If this sounds demented, it is, most delightfully. The Hartmans were meant to be seen, not described, and they have to be seen to be believed.

Just as their own ingenious comedy always has an unprofessional persuasion about it, this whole show seems to take the audience along on the picnic.

Much of this intimacy is due to Hank Ladd, who strolls on and

off relating diverting nonsense which often consists of libelling the stars. He is too relaxed to tag a typical MC, and steps ably out of that class with his "Thousand Islands Song" which might well be a real hit.

Elaine Stritch proves herself invaluable for a show like "Angel in the Wings." Starting out as a hussy who does baby talk for the domestic broadcast, she shortly won herself an encore last night as a blonde savage disdaining "Civilization."

Nadine Gae and Peter Hamilton have the major dancing assignments of the show, and carry them off with fresh agility. Their most striking number is a violent modern Apache affair in strange vivid color. "If It Were Easy to Do."

This song as well as several others are carolled by Eileen Barton, an attractive young lady who knows how to sell a number whether it is worth it or not.

Johnny Barnes perks up the sketches and adds a bright loose-jointed tap dance.

Altogether it is an agreeable dozen people to have on the stage. This is not a revue that is rouined to hit you in the face with climaxes. It all seems to roll along quite casually and achieves a kind of domestic continuity as it goes.

The physical production by Donald Oenslager is slick but simple enough to remain a frame.

It leaves you with the pleasant superiority of having ignored a label reading "Do Not Open Until Christmas."

"Angel in the Wings"—continued

NEW YORK
Herald Tribune

DECEMBER 12, 1947

— By HOWARD BARNES —

The Hartmans!

THE Hartmans are at the top of their form in "Angel in the Wings," the new intimate revue at the Coronet. They make much of little in a skimpy and uneven show. When they are clowning through such hilarious sketches as "Up Early With the Upjohns," or "The Salina Select Garden Club," the musical is in the great tradition of travesty. Between times, it is a catch-as-catch-can entertainment. Nadine Gae, Peter Hamilton and Johnny Barnes do some first-rate dancing:

Elaine Stritch has a good take-off of Hildegarde and Hank Ladd contributes good, bad and indifferent monologues. At its best, the production is fresh, breezy and unpretentious. If it leaves something to be desired, it is because of thin material and repetitious routines.

The stars run through a few of their familiar dance satires, but they are more intent on buffoonery than hoofing in "Angel in the Wings." As their fans might have anticipated, they are wonderfully funny in their straight numbers. It is difficult to say whether Paul Hartman, with his grotesque grimaces, or Grace, with her deadpan capers, is the more expert comedian. It is enough that they collaborate brilliantly in the burlesque of a breakfast radio program, a revival of the dear, dead

days of vaudeville, a skit on G. I.'s at college, or a lecture on exploring. Even in the less inspired interludes their participation gives them gusto of a rare sort.

Ladd gives the piece what little continuity it has with between-scene talks to the audience. He recounts some of the oldest jokes on record, makes disparaging remarks about Hartman and rises to a moment of genuine comic artistry in describing his life with father to get a "serious note" into the proceedings. Much of his material is reminiscent of the less amusing aspects of radio shows. At least he has great assurance. Bob Hilliard and Carl Sigman take credit for the songs, which are generally as derivative as the jests. "If It Were Easy to Do," gives Miss Gae and Hamilton a musical frame for a dramatic dance and

"Thousand Islands Song" is amusing, but "Angel in the Wings" is not likely to be remembered for its words and music.

While the stars do little fast-stepping, the aforementioned team and Barnes are very much on their toes. The latter taps magnificently in "Tambourine," a number which would have distinguished a far more opulent offering. Eileen Barton has the rather thankless task of vocalizing and Viola Roache plays a Hokinson character with relish in the climax. The settings by Donald Oenslager are simplified to the point of a couple of backdrops and a few props. "Angel in the Wings" is frequently bright. It stars the Hartmans. Beyond that it is more of a night club show than a Broadway musical.

The Sun

DECEMBER 12, 1947

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Hartmans Make a Show of It.

"Angel in the Wings" is a brisk, compact, small-cast revue, definitely on the skimpy side, but it is helped along by those goofy and vastly entertaining Hartmans, and they do a great deal to make a pleasant evening of it. The first performance was given last night at the Coronet.

You know about these Hartmans, Paul and Grace. They've been delighting the supper-club clientele for all these years. Paul is a waggish, boneless, carrot-thatched buffoon, given to grace,

gaucheness and wonderful nonsense. Grace is wide-eyed, prankful and collapsible and is all of her husband's equal in turning from gaiety to lugubriousness,

and in the fashioning of comedy that is demented and exhilarating.

In this new "Angel in the Wings," brought along by Marjorie and Sherman Ewing, the Hartmans dance and prance and bang each other about. They offer a magician's act, against the traditional street drop of old-time vaudeville days. They inhabit a campus trailer, having gone back to school because of the housing shortage, and they do a funny native dance as a pair of explorers appearing at a session of the Salina Select Garden Club. And they're positively uproarious in "Up Early With the Upjohns," a satire of the man-and-wife breakfast broadcast.

Hank Ladd is the commentator of the show and ambles through the proceedings, delivering his monologues in leisurely fashion. Nadine Gae and Peter Hamilton

are excellent dancers. Viola Roache gets a gleam of true comedy into a Helen Hokinson character. Johnny Barnes is helpful and nimble-footed and Elaine Stritch turns in a good impersonation of Hildergard.

The revue's sketches, written by Ladd, Ted Luce and the Hartmans, need the superior clowning that the Hartmans bring to them. The lyrics and music of Bob Hilliard and Carl Sigman are by no means notable. Donald Oenslager has supplied some neat, attractive settings.

"Angel in the Wings" hasn't much substance. It had its origin on the summer-theater circuit, and it frequently gives you the impression that it is lacking as a full-measure entertainment. But it reveals the Hartmans in their very best form, and that's worth a visit to the Coronet.

"The Gentleman from Athens"

The New York Times

DECEMBER 10, 1947

Anthony Quinn Appears in Emmet Lavery's Play About Congress, 'The Gentleman From Athens'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Having his heart in the right place, Emmet Lavery has written a popular homily about integrity in politics, "The Gentleman from Athens," which was acted at the Mansfield last evening. This is the Mr. Lavery who wrote a high-minded play about Justice Holmes a few seasons ago, and who startled the Un-American Activities Committee a few weeks ago by answering when they were probing into his politics. The gentleman from Poughkeepsie said no, he is

not a Communist.

But he did acknowledge being president of the Screen Writers Guild, and that has a particular bearing on last evening's drama. In popularizing a good idea Mr. Lavery has been rifling the old clothes closet of screen and drama. Although a playgoer may want to be on his side, Mr. Lavery makes it difficult. When the going becomes difficult he is too fond of hokum.

"The Gentleman from Athens" is

the story of a bruiser from the West who accomplishes a good deed by the wrong method. Newly elected to Congress, he introduces an audacious bill to establish world government. When his fellow Congressmen block the bill and him he gets it passed by subterfuge involving intended blackmail. In self-defense, Congress then looks into his past and discovers that he bought the primary election. Just as Congress is on the point of tossing him out, a fellow thug turns up with enough scandal to intimidate the leader of the House and cancel the impeachment. But acting on the advice of a highly-educated female secretary, the Congressman agrees that the ends do not justify the means, and he refuses to use blackmail a second time. P. S.—He gets the title.

This is a constructive idea for a play, particularly for a man of Mr. Lavery's conscientious interest in public affairs. But neither do the

'GENTLEMAN FROM ATHENS'

Play by Emmet Lavery; directed by Sam Wasserman; setting and lighting by Ralph Allward; presented by Martin Goch, in association with Eunice Hanley, at the Mansfield Theatre Tuesday evening, December 9, 1947. The cast:

Conrad V. Kilpatrick	Watson White
Miss Mary Kilpatrick	Ethel Browning
Morgan Kilpatrick	Ala Hewitt
Lee Kilpatrick	Edith Atwater
Daniel	Craig Thompson
Congressman Ed Lawrence	Gavin Gordon
Hon. E. S. Christopher	Anthony Quinn
Igor Sissanov	Freda Chappin
News reel director	Frank Rowan
Mike Rykowski	Leo Pulan
Congressman Andrews	Leopold Badia
Congressman Burgess	Ed Lattimer
Congressman Harsh	Arthur Jarrell
Congressman (Mrs.) Brinkley	Elise May Gordon
	Loraine Kerr
	Oliver Crawford
	Leonard Auerbach

ends justify the means in drama. To make it popular Mr. Lavery has filled it with a lot of sentimentalities and some hocus-pocus calculated to depress theatrogoers

"The Gentleman from Athens"—continued

who are instinctively on his side. He identifies the Congressman's lesson in ethics with his love for a ravishing secretary, which is strictly formula goods in playwriting. He sweetens his message with adventures into horse racing, and brings in stock scenes and stock characters with disillusioning facility. "The Gentleman From Athens" serves to remind us that "Born Yesterday" is an extremely good comedy written and pro-

duced by discriminating craftsmen.

Sam Wanamaker has directed "The Gentleman From Athens" with hackneyed resourcefulness. As the embattled Congressman, Anthony Quinn gives an ebullient performance that is considerably more genuine than the play. Handsome Edith Atwater plays the susceptible secretary attractively. As a somewhat wayward Soviet Em-

bassy attaché, Feodor Chaliapin gives an amusing performance. Lou Polan, who has been evading the law in Gotham dramas for years, plays a gangster with his usual relish. As an aging spinster with a heart of gold, Ethel Brown- ing gives a birdlike performance that captivates the stoniest hearts in the audience. Alan Hewitt competently acts the futile role of a Washington wastrel. As a professional Congressman, Gavin Gor-

don smiles with studied condescension and speaks words of love with cloying insincerity.

As an American, Mr. Lavery has high principles worth respecting. As a craftsman in this play he writes like a hack. But "The Gentleman From Athens" easily passes the theatre's loyalty test. If Mrs. Lela Rogers really did think it was subversive, she must have been overeating red herring.

New York World-Telegram

DECEMBER 10, 1947

New Play Tries to Find Fun in One World Idea

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

A curious combination of materials is employed in "The Gentleman from Athens." It concerns an eccentric, but earnest attempt to apply the One World idea, and is billed as a comedy.

Its situations are farcical in construction, but the humor is rare and mild.

It is the sort of play an average theatergoer can outline to the

finish, the instant he sees the two leading characters meet.

Whatever interest is sustained springs from the like vigor and enthusiasm of Anthony Quinn's playing in the title role. This Sock Christopher, action of a Greek family in the Napa Valley, is a hardhitting, tough dealer who believes in pushing instead of getting pushed and getting what he wants.

Picks His Own Fight.

He is not abnormally unscrupulous, but he feeds people their own medicine. In a burst of effervescent showmanship he decides to introduce a bill the day he is sworn into the House, and picks at random a rejected plea for a United States of the World.

His methods of getting the bill passed bring retaliation from fellow Congressmen. The question resolves into one of whether he should fight back by whatever wicky means he can, or should start over with a clear record, as the secretary who loves him wants him to.

The issue of the means being justified by the end as applied to the United Nations idea is somehow not innate comedy these days. Banded about without wit in a casual manner it can be embarrassing.

Filmsly Contrived.

The story of Sock has a high-minded purpose. It misses because its dramatic execution is

filmsly contrived.

The characters in conflict with him are trite as paper dolls. The story develops with exaggerations too wild to be funny. For a comedy, the dialogue has neither lift nor unexpectedness.

In the face of all this, Quinn is memorable. He has a pugilistic

youth and force and warm eagerness that make Sock entirely likeable. Despite his ready tricks and hot temper he is a guy who is good, but just needs a little pushing in the right direction.

Edith Atwater gives a forthright performance as the Virginia landholder who rents her estate to Sock, goes to work for him and falls in love with him.

Of the others, Gavin Gordon is earnest as a conventional Congressman, Ethel Browning has some light moments as the heroine's aunt, Lou Polan is eagerly good-natured as an old pal of Sock, and Feodor Chaliapin is a vociferous Russian diplomat.

Journal  American

DECEMBER 10, 1947

Isn't 'Anti' Anything, Only Disappointing

By ROBERT GARLAND

Last night at the Mansfield was one of the season's most disappointing evenings. Lela Rogers, Ginger's usually level-headed mother, had us all wrought up for nothing. In spite of her well-intended warnings, Emmet Lavery's "The Gentleman from Athens" isn't "anti" anything.

Except, perhaps, the theatre. For the author of "First Legion" and "The Magnificent Yankee," which weren't good plays either, has fathered a stillborn "comedy of today" and Martin Gosh, with Eunice Healey, has brought it in with a cast that most certainly isn't helpful.

But the big disappointment isn't in Mr. Lavery's play. Remembering "First Legion" and "The Magnificent Yankee,"

which still seem better than they were because of Bert Lytell and Louis Calhern respectively, I hadn't expected much of the same playwright's "The Gentleman from Athens."

I had expected much of Sam Wanamaker's direction, however. Not that Mr. Wanamaker has anything or anybody on which to work a miracle. But he has got Anthony Quinn, making his Broadway bow, and Ethel Browning and Creighton Thompson, who are natural-born actors. But even they're defeated!

Rugged Kinship

Why, I wonder, does Emmet Lavery's "The Gentleman from Athens" consistently remind me

of an unsuccessful attempt to re-write Garson Kanin's successful "Born Yesterday?" And to redirect it? It well might be the close dramaturgic kinship of their rugged motivating characters.

Harry Brock and Stephen Christopher aren't only brothers under the skin. They're brothers over the skin as well. They think alike. They talk alike. They act alike. And, as far as Mr. Quinn from the movies can resemble Mr. Douglas from the radio, they look like one another.

Only the Stephen Christopher whose middle name is Socrates comes officially to Washington from the sunstruck State of California. There, at the nation's capital, he stumbles upon a discarded bill in which a United Nations of the World has been ineffectually recommended to the Congress.

Even here Mr. Lavery double-crosses his own story. If his Socratic West Coaster had revived Wendell Willkie's One-World-or-None because he honestly believed in it, you might have honestly believed in him. But the gentleman from Athens merely picks it as a gag, eeny-meeny-miney-mo-like.

Director Fails

Suicidal as this may be, non-

serious and unfunny, it's made to seem even more so by the direction at the Mansfield. And by the acting which stems from that direction. Sam Wanamaker, the directorial hero of "Joan of Lorraine," never manages to pull the plodding piece together.

Nevertheless, Anthony Quinn comes blundering through as a refugee from Hollywood with verve and value to give to Broadway's three dimensional theatre. It's certainly not his fault that the Honorable Stephen Socrates Christopher isn't bigger, better and more believable.

Ethel Browning, as Mary Kilpatrick of Alexandria, Virginia, and Creighton Thompson, as Daniel, the Kilpatricks' old family servant, manage to be bigger, better and more believable than you'd think possible under the circumstances. But then, they're natural born actors.

The others and the setting are hereby left to themselves and their creators. . . . Lela Rogers should have familiarized herself with Emmet Lavery's "The Gentleman from Athens" before sounding off about it. A keen business woman, the only red she'd have seen was the red side of the producer's ledger.

DECEMBER 10, 1947

— By HOWARD BARNES —

Socrates Goes to Washington

THERE is a fine indignation in Emmet Lavery's "The Gentleman From Athens," but it is given stuttering expression in his new comedy at the Mansfield. In a play which must inevitably be compared to "State of the Union" and "Born Yesterday," the author has examined democracy, world affairs and romance on a series of parallel planes. At times, what with the splendid acting of Anthony Quinn in the leading role of a Greek vintner from California taking his seat in Congress and fighting for

a United States of the World, the show takes on an incandescent glow. It flickers too frequently as Lavery switches from his central thesis to a lot of contrived stage business.

Any charge that "The Gentleman From Athens" is even vaguely subversive or un-American can be dismissed with a horse-laugh. The work deals with the realities of our day and our way of life honestly and patriotically. If anything, it treats subjects of portentous significance too gingerly to make them the core of what pretends to be an ideological drama. The latter-day Socrates who descends on Washington to see if he cannot help out the confusion which might obtain in the legislative bodies of the nation is too broadly drawn for conviction.

The shilly-shallying of a liberal house-holder, who is alternately for him and against him, results in more theatrical to-do than consequence.

Quinn, who is making his stage debut here after many years of screen performing, is the chief interpreter of Lavery's democratic call to arms. He is both vital and sympathetic as the son of a Napa Valley fruit peddler who takes on Congress the way he would a crap game. His dickers with a Russian embassy attache, which involve a three-horse parlay, are great good fun. His gradual realization that the One World he dreams of is difficult to achieve is etched in a brilliant bit of make-believe. When he falters, it is because the script lets him down. It is a pity that

it does so on more than one occasion.

Edith Atwater, as the daughter of an old Virginia family who is wrested out of cynicism by the sheer enthusiasm of the Greek, is less successful in making the play come off cerebrally or emotionally. The final happy resolution of the love affair is not much to write home about. Ethel Browning has a splendid bit as an elderly aunt of the heroine, who takes her place as the congressmans secretary when she has let him down and Gavin Gordon is just adequate to the role of a rival suitor. Sam Wanamaker has staged "The Gentleman From Athens" with a flourish. There is just not enough in the play to warrant the attention it should have had.

The Sun

DECEMBER 10, 1947

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

A Miss at the Mansfield.

Emmet Lavery, disturbed by the possibilities of carnage in an atomic age, expresses his concern for the future of the human race in a crude and harassing play called "The Gentleman From Athens," placed last night upon the stage of the Mansfield. There is no cheering today from this corner.

"The Gentlemen from Athens," is something of a jumble of high-powered politics, outright farce and drama-with-a-message. It starts fairly briskly in its opening act, runs down quickly in its

second, and then flounders for the rest of the evening.

Playwright Lavery, who wrote an effective biographical piece in "The Magnificent Yankee," now presents a new Congressman from Athens, California—Stephen

Socrates Christopher, a Greek-American and a go-getting roughneck.

Christopher, on his very first day in the House, decides to make an impression with the introduction of a bill, and it's a discarded bill for the establishment of a United States of the world that he sponsors. He gets it through by trickery, but his foes go after him for fraud in connection with his election. When it's all done he has lost his seat in Congress but he has won a pretty girl and he has acquired some new and high-minded ideas about service to his country.

Anthony Quinn, who comes to us from the screen, has moderate success with the role of the unpolished Christopher, the barbarian from California's fruit belt. There is something of the junk king of "Born Yesterday," in the

character of the Greek who gets to Congress, and Quinn brings some charm, vigor and raciness to his playing. I found Christopher entertaining enough in the first act, but he got to be pretty exhausting by 10:45.

Edith Atwater, again playing the secretary to a monster, turns in a capable performance. There is some routine acting in other roles, parts the author didn't bother to write. Sam Wanamaker has done the staging. Ralph Alswang has provided a mellow interior for a Virginia mansion.

Emmet Lavery, alarmed by world conditions and apparently terrified by thoughts of World War III, comes out for one-world government in an inept, digressive and declamatory play. In the case of "The Gentleman From Athens," the drama takes a backward step.

DAILY NEWS

DECEMBER 10, 1947

'Gentleman From Athens' Okays Democracy in a Dull Sort of Way

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Emmet Lavery, whose "The Magnificent Yankee" was an inspiring dramatic biography of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, last evening filed a three-act endorsement of democ-

racy at the Mansfield Theatre under the title of "The Gentleman from Athens." As an endorsement it is okay; as a play it is surprisingly punk, and except for two performances it is annoyingly acted.

Charles Hale Hoyt, who died two years before Mr. Lavery was born, wrote a durable comedy about a roughneck in the halls of Congress

titled "A Texas Steer." Somehow Mr. Lavery has stumbled on this work and tried to dress it up with some modern switcheroos about world politics, with a bit of "The State of the Union" thrown in. The result is a hodgepodge which disintegrates from scene to scene, until a stagehand brings it to a

merciful end by lowering the curtain.

The gentleman from Athens is one Stephen Socrates (Sock, for short) Christopher, an American of Greek parentage who comes to Washington as a Representative from Athens, Calif., supposedly a Napa Valley wine town. He is a mugg. Nobody is more surprised than he—and, as an eyewitness, I say nobody advisedly—to discover that he believes in the American democratic process.

Wants One World

Sock wants to be a lawmaker and he starts off by proposing that we all have a United States of the World. Naturally he runs into difficulties too obvious to mention. He has a romance with a highborn Washington girl, which, also, is too obvious to mention. The trouble is that his difficulties and his romance aren't exciting enough to make a play.

Anthony Quinn, a well known screen player who is making his

debut as a round actor, does an engaging job in the title role: he has vitality, humor and good timing. And Ethel Browning, a tiny lady who played with Joseph Jefferson in "Rip Van Winkle," offers an excellent character performance in a minor role.

The company includes Edith Atwater, Gavin Gordon, Arthur Jarry and Feodor Chaliapin—the latter, a son of the greatest of all basses, seeming to be a minor Philip Loeb. I suspect that Sam Wanamaker's direction has made some of the actors look worse than they really are.